

# Stress and Anxiety

A brief guide

## Stress & Anxiety

Stress. All of us will experience it at some point, whether it be from their job, education or other responsibilities. Some people are more prone to stress and may find seemingly simple tasks are a challenging experience.

This April it is Stress Awareness Month, so we've created a brief guide on ways to reduce your stress levels using practical tips and advice. We hope this will empower you to take control of your worries and work towards a life as free of stress as possible.



# What is stress?

Stress can manifest in many different ways, both with physical and psychological symptoms.

## **Physical symptoms can include:**

- Headaches
- Trouble sleeping
- Stomach issues such as diarrhoea or constipation
- Sweating
- Aches and pains
- Change in appetite
- Frequently becoming ill

## **Stress can also affect your mood, such as:**

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Becoming easily irritated or angry
- Feeling overwhelmed.

## What can lead us to become stressed?

- A demanding workload
- Deadlines
- The death of a loved one
- Moving house
- Caring for a sick relative
- Losing your job
- Planning for an important event
- Debt

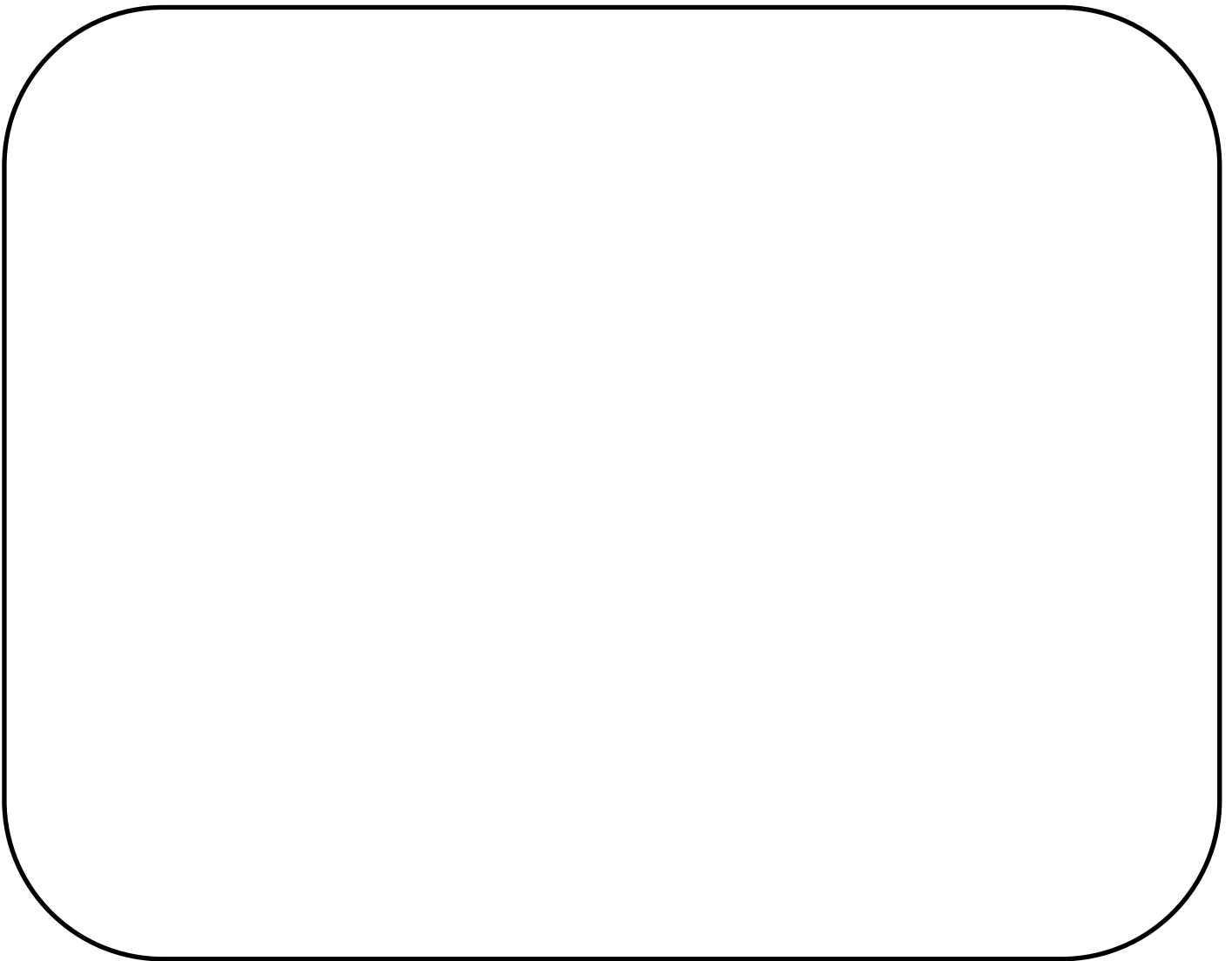
## Is stress ever a good thing?

Like anxiety, stress is our internal warning system alerting us to danger by increasing our blood pressure and heart rate.

In small doses, stress can have advantages. The energy it gives you can be useful for providing an extra boost to achieve targets and get stuff done.

There is a word for this; *eustress*, meaning “beneficial stress”. Instead of disarming someone it motivates them forward. Examples of this would include working all night to finish an essay at school, or giving you the confidence to perform in front of a crowd. Good stress can feel invigorating, but only for a short time.

*How do you typically handle stress?*

A large, empty rounded rectangle box with a black border, intended for a person to write their response to the question above.

*Take a look at what you've just written. Are you **taking control** of the situation, or are you taking a passive approach? Are you actively looking at **ways to solve the problem** or surrendering to the feeling of being powerless? Are you letting your stress dictate your thoughts and actions, or are you using your thoughts and actions to help you manage the stress?*

**When you're frozen  
with worry, try to  
keep WARM...**

## Worry

Think about what is bothering you. Has anything triggered the stress? Can you identify precisely where it has come from?

*Bad Example: I hate my job*

*Good Example: I'm worried that I won't be able to finish the project on in time because I forgot to ask for the information I need from my manager.*

## Assumption

What beliefs do you hold about yourself? Are you approaching the situation from a negative or positive angle?

*Bad Example: I'm so stupid I can't even finish this simple thing. I'm going to get fired!*

*Good example: My manager probably doesn't even realise I need this information. I'm sure once I speak to her everything will be sorted out.*

## Resolution

What steps can you take to resolve this situation?

*Bad Example: I feel so helpless, I might as well just give up.*

*Good Example: I'll send an email to my manager tomorrow morning asking for the information I need.*

## Moving on

Is there anything different you could do to minimise this type of stress in the future? What self care can you put in place to reduce the symptoms of stress?

*Bad Example: I'm never going to take on a project like this ever again.*

*Good Example: Now I know that I need to make a detailed plan whenever I do something like this again.*

# Manage Your Time

When we're feeling overwhelmed it can be tempting to avoid tackling our responsibilities. Sometimes anxiety can affect us so much that we feel genuinely paralysed when it comes to making decisions.

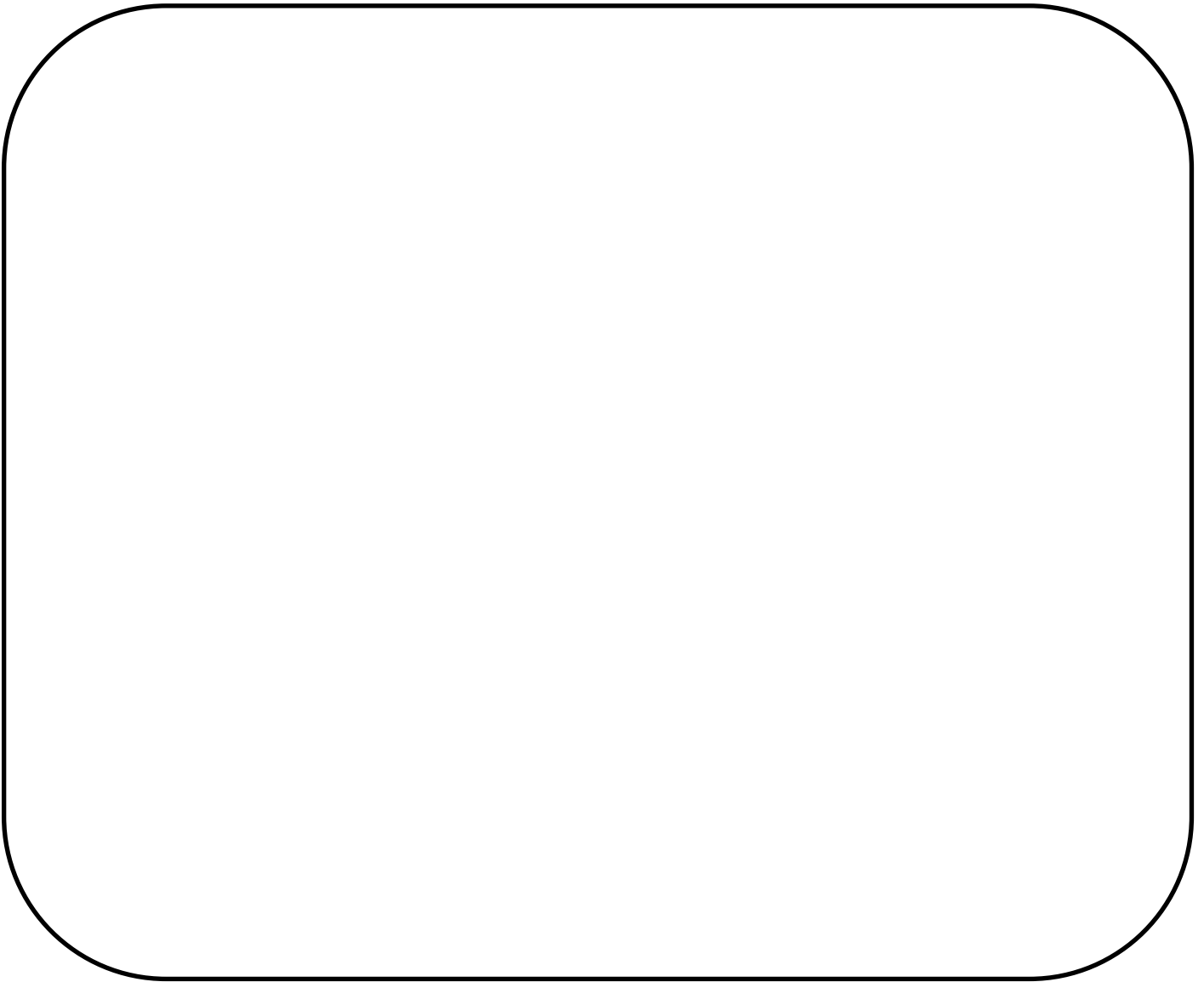
What's keeping you up at night? Make a list of everything you've been avoiding. Seeing it all written down may alarm you at first, but taking an inventory of your upcoming tasks and responsibilities will help you to become as prepared as possible to manage your time and reduce your stress levels.

Remember: when it comes to managing stress, it's better to **act** now then **react** later.



# Break It Down

*Write a list of everything you need to do today and assign it and colour-code it so you know what needs to be done first.*



*What is a priority? (something that's **urgent** and **important**)*



*What needs to be done **soon**, but isn't as important as other tasks?*



*What can you ask someone else to **help** you with?*



*What can be done at a **later** time?*

## **Examine Your Reaction**

Anxiety makes us think in circles, forever dwelling on a problem and imagining all the ways something can go wrong. Sometimes we need to break free of this loop and look at the situation more objectively. Ask yourself:

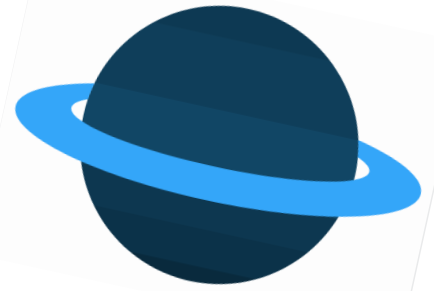
**What am I achieving by worrying about this?**

**What can I do to change the outcome of the situation?**

If the answer to both of these questions is “nothing”, then it does not deserve to occupy this much of your time! Focus on the things you *can* change.

# Zoom Out

Has a specific event made you feel stressed? Perhaps you got into an argument with someone close to you? You're probably upset and replaying the situation over and over in your head. Instead, try to imagine that you're looking at the situation from a distance.



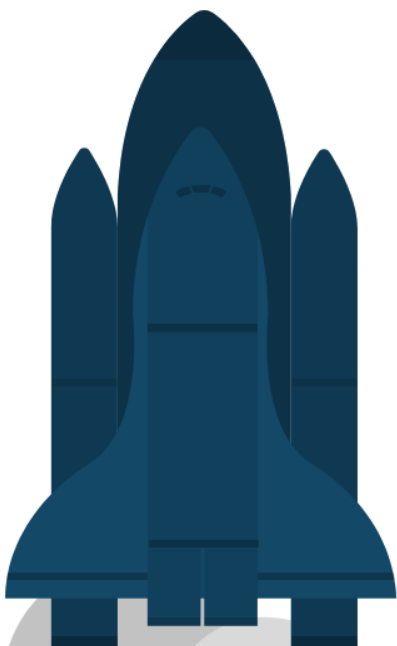
You're floating above yourself, looking down. Watch the situation unfold as if you were watching it from someone else's perspective. Did your friend really react that way, or was it just your perception of the situation? What would someone who didn't know you think?

You're floating above the area where you live. Watch the aftermath of the situation and how the world is changed by it. How much damage has this situation actually caused?

Think about how many houses there are on your street. Zoom out.

Think about how many streets there are in your town. Zoom out. Think about how many people there are who live in these houses and how many of them are experiencing the same thoughts, fears and worries as you.

You're floating above the Earth, a distant astronaut in a spaceship millions of miles away. Is this situation really worth worrying about? Will it matter to you in a week? A month? A year? A *lightyear*?



# Establishing Boundaries

## Say “No”

Sometimes we agree to take on more than we can handle—whether it be physically (an extra shift at work) or emotionally (other people’s unhappiness) and this can lead us to become stressed and anxious. Are you putting unnecessary pressure on yourself? Practise saying no to things that are optional if you do not feel you’re able to cope with them at present.

## Ask For Help

If you feel like you’re being buried under the weight of extra tasks or emotions, reach out to those around you to share some of the weight. Confide in a friend or ask a colleague to aid you on the project you working on for an afternoon. Be honest about what you can realistically achieve and have a plan in place to manage what you feel you are unable to accomplish.

# **Other Ways To Manage Stress**

## **Physical Activity**

Exercise is a great way to release the pent up tension stress and anxiety can cause. It also acts as a distraction, as you are focussed on how your body is moving (and balancing!).

## **Keep A Diary**

Make a note of the situations which have triggered a significant feeling of stress, as well as how you reacted to them. It's a great way to examine how to become better at managing stress and what areas of your life are causing you the most alarm.

## **Get Plenty Of Rest**

Your body is better equipped to fight stress if you are well-rested. Give yourself enough time to recharge by getting some early nights and making sure you're taking a moment to relax before bed.

## **Laugh**

Laugh might not be the best medicine but it's certainly a very good one. You probably don't feel like a good hearty laugh when you're feeling stressed, but laughter relaxes the body and triggers the release of endorphins.

## **Eat Well, Drink Well**

Caffeine and alcohol can both exacerbate feelings of stress and worry. As tempting as it is to use chocolate and pizza as a coping mechanism in times of stress, making sure you're nourishing your body will give you more energy.

## **Reach Out**

If you're struggling, confide in close friends, family members or a partner. They might be able to help you, or at least reassure you.

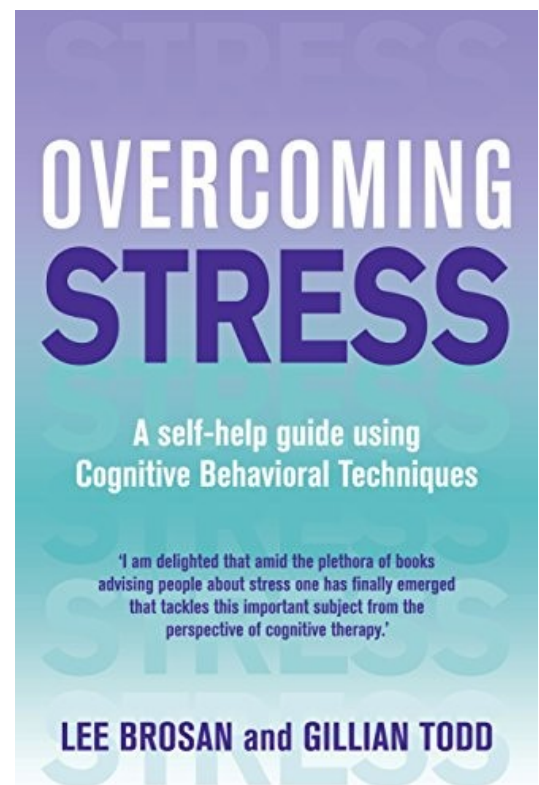
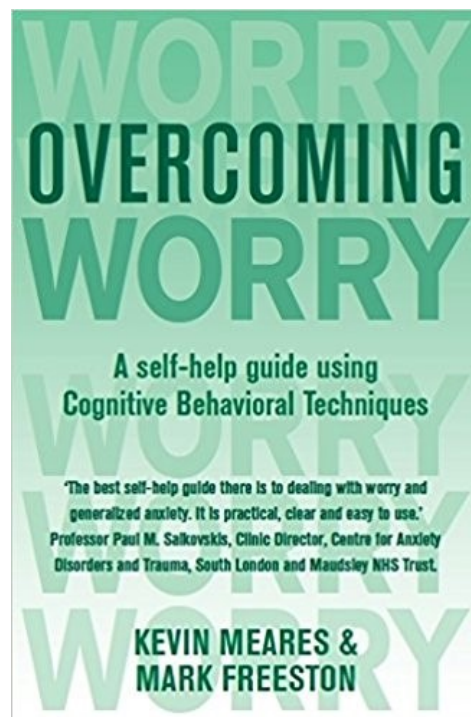
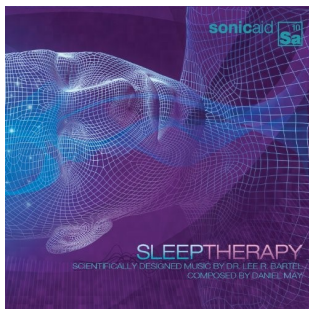
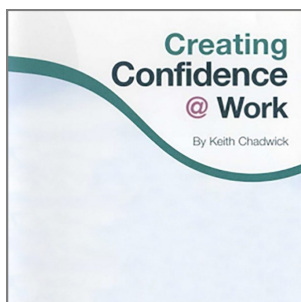
## **Meditate**

A moment of calm in a hectic day can be an incredibly effective way of releasing stress. Taking a moment to reflect, breathe and help you gain a new perspective on stressful situations. Apps like [Headspace](#) are portable and can be used not just at home but when you're out and about.

## **Consider Professional Support**

Therapy is no longer seen as something that only happens in a crisis, in fact many choose to access support as an early intervention to take control of their stress and anxiety before it becomes too overwhelming. Anxiety UK provide counselling and CBT to help our members manage anxiety, stress and anxiety-based depression.

**Anxiety UK stocks a range of relaxation CDs, self-help guides and resources to help you manage your stress and anxiety.**



**As part of a membership with us you can access reduced-cost counselling, CBT and clinical hypnotherapy**

**Visit [anxietyuk.org.uk](http://anxietyuk.org.uk) for more details**

Anxiety UK offers a wide range of services and support for those living with/affected by all types of anxiety, stress and anxiety-based depression.

For information visit:

[www.anxietyuk.org.uk](http://www.anxietyuk.org.uk)

Call: 08444 775 774

Email: [support@anxietyuk.org.uk](mailto:support@anxietyuk.org.uk)

Anxiety UK

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